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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFATT

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: HAS SALEH LOST THE SOUTH? BOLD TALK OF
INDEPENDENCE IN ADEN

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. In meetings in Aden attended by PolOff, independent figures and opposition leaders) including members of the regime of the former People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen (PDRY)) called openly for Southern independence, declaring that "unity was over." Describing an underground movement termed Harak al-Janub (the Southern Movement), they detailed the movement's structure and indicated that if peaceful means to gain independence were frustrated, violence would follow. These statements mark a new level of secessionist discussion, and begin to suggest new uncertainties for Yemen's near-term political unity. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) During a recent visit to Aden, PolOff was invited to observe a meeting organized by Basha Bashraheel, editor of al-Ayyam, an independent southern newspaper, with the goal of uniting the two main factions of the Southern Movement. Alternately calling it Harak al-Janub (the Southern Movement) or Harak a-Silmi (the Peaceful Movement), the assembled group described the movement's current structure and goals. A common theme echoed throughout the meeting was that the era of unity of North and South Yemen was over, and independence was the only option for the South. (Comment: Post believes it is important to note that the below comments were made with USG consumption in mind. Participants in the meeting made no bones about the fact that American support for independence is an end-goal of the Southern Movement, which certainly would explain why they invited an EmbOff to sit in. End Comment. End Note.)

AN UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

¶3. (S) The first, demonstrations-based phase of the movement is over and the movement has gone into a second underground phase, according to Bashraheel. Five leaders of the Southern Movement confirmed this development during the February 15 meeting organized by the Bashraheel family to unite the movement's two factions. (Note: The first faction consisted of journalist Ahmed al-Qamaa, writer and activist Ali Haitham al-Ghareeb, an unidentified writer, former PDRY military commander Mohamed Saleh Tammah and former Yemeni Deputy Prime Minister and Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) member Mohamed Haidara Masdous. The second faction's membership remains less clear, but was represented by Ali Munasser, the Aden chair of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) who was jailed for six months for involvement in last year's demonstrations. The second faction seems to skew towards mainstream YSP membership. End Note.)

¶4. (S) Bashraheel said that the movement was also continuing to put up roadblocks, citing those in Dhale and Radfan in January, which succeeded in securing the release of southern detainees from ROYG custody. Although the movement's leaders expressed reluctance to move to violent confrontation with

the ROYG, all expressed willingness to do so if peaceful means were exhausted. They mentioned attacks on troops and military installations as the likely first step.

STRUCTURE

15. (S) Ghareeb, the writer who has been in and out of jail for involvement with the movement, told PolOff that the movement went into a more discreet mode in late 2008 after the ROYG proved that it would not tolerate the peaceful demonstrations of 2007 and early 2008. He said the movement was currently organizing governorate-level committees capable of operating independently in their regions. The Southern Movement's central structure is comprised of two committees) an internal planning committee and an outward-facing public relations committee. Ghareeb hoped they would be able to announce progress on organization and planning within two months. (Note: If on schedule, this announcement would come at close to the same time as the scheduled April 27 parliamentary elections. End Note.)

MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT

16. (S) When asked directly if the military officers involved in earlier demonstrations were part of the Southern Movement, Tammah told PolOff, "Yes, absolutely. They are with us. And not just the military) the (former PDRY) bureaucrats who lost their jobs, too." Tammah, an AmCit who recently returned to Aden after 15 years of self-exile in New York City, said the Southern Movement in Yemen was well-connected to South Yemeni expatriates around the world, specifically

citing the U.S. and the U.K. (Note: A protest in support of the South Yemen cause took place in front of the State Department in 2008. End Note.) Qamaa, the journalist, asserted that "70 percent" of the South supports independence.

LEADERSHIP

17. (S) The question of leadership remained unresolved at the end of the meeting. Masdous, who in addition to being a former ROYG Deputy Prime Minister from 1990-1993 was also a diplomat and military commander in the PDRY, was the most senior figure present. His writings are widely read by Southern secessionists. His health, however, was clearly failing and he recently underwent major heart surgery in Cairo. The name of Hassan Ba'um, currently on the lam and likely in Shuaib (Dhale' governorate), was mentioned several times as an ideological ally, although not as the movement's official leader. (Note: Ba'um, like the Bashraheels, is working to unite the Southern Movement's factions. Ba'um has called for unification under the banner "National Conference for the Sons of the South." It does not appear that Ba'um and the Bashraheels are at odds with one another, but rather that each is working towards a common goal. End Note.) No mention was made of Ali Nasser Mohamed, a former PDRY President, or Haider Abu Bakr Al-Attas, a former Prime Minister of PDRY, both exiles who are sometimes cited as potential southern leaders.

COMMENT

18. (S) The movement appears to have moved into a new phase of development, with an increasingly complex internal structure and an ideology that has moved beyond the possibility of reconciliation with the ROYG. Two key variables that will determine the future strength and ultimate success of the Southern Movement are popular support and leadership. Regardless, if such frank discussion of the need for Southern independence comes to President Saleh's attention, it is sure to stoke his deeply held fears of a break-down in the fragile unity he forged after the 1994 civil war. END COMMENT.

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